

# A Family Guide To Preschool Special Education Services In Maryland



**MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services  
Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program/Preschool Special Education Services

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Maryland's  
*Birth*  
to  
*K*  
Early  
Childhood  
Intervention  
& Education  
System of Services  
For Young Children  
With Disabilities  
and Their Families



About  
This Guide

A *Family Guide To Preschool Special Education Services in Maryland* is part of Maryland’s Birth to Kindergarten Parent Information Series, a collection of publications designed to support families in the statewide early intervention and education system of services in Maryland.

With this guide, we wish to welcome you into a community dedicated to the enrichment of child development, and to guide you through a process created by parents and professionals to enhance the potential of your child and support your family.

To receive copies of this guide, or others in the series, contact your Local School System. See last page for a list of Local School System Child Find offices.

# Welcome to Preschool Special Education Services in Maryland

A child’s early years are full of excitement and change for every parent—a great balancing act between dreams and challenges. From the earliest stages of a child’s life, a family can enhance all aspects of their child’s development.

While all children grow and develop at their own rate, some preschoolers experience delays in their development as a result of a disability, medical conditions, or other at-risk factors. In Maryland, all children and youth with disabilities, beginning at birth through the end of the school year in which they turn 21 years old, are assured a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) provided at no cost to your family. Preschool special education services are available for eligible children, age three to kindergarten.

Maryland is unique in that families have the choice to begin receiving preschool special education services provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) at age three or to continue early intervention services beyond their child’s third birthday, until the beginning of the school year following their child’s 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. This extended Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) option is only available if the child and family have received early intervention services and the child is found eligible for preschool special education and related services prior to age three. At any point after a child turns three, the family may decide to move to services through an IEP. Once the family has made the choice, however, they cannot go back to services through an IFSP.

For additional information about the family choice at age three, please refer to *A Family Guide to Next Steps*, part of Maryland’s Birth to Kindergarten Parent Information Series.

## What The Law Says

The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** is a federal law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention and special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, and children and youth with disabilities. The State of Maryland provides a seamless, comprehensive system of coordinated services for children birth through age 21 with disabilities and their families.



# Narrowing the Gap

## Early Childhood Outcomes and School Readiness

An important outcome of preschool special education services is to narrow the gap in development that exists between preschoolers with special needs and their same age peers. The IDEA requires that all states measure the effectiveness of early intervention and preschool special education services by reporting on **three early childhood outcomes**: children have positive social-emotional skills and relationships, children acquire and use knowledge and skills to successfully participate in daily activities, and children use appropriate behaviors to meet their needs, leading to increased independence. **We know that if children make developmental progress in these three child outcomes, they will be ready for school** and ready to play, learn, and develop independence at home, in school, and in the community. The three broad outcomes are comprehensive, functional, and look at development as an integrated process.

### The 3 Early Childhood Outcomes For School Readiness

Early Childhood Outcome 1	Early Childhood Outcome 2	Early Childhood Outcome 3
<b>Children have positive social relationships</b> <i>This involves skills such as:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relating with adults</li><li>• Relating with other children</li><li>• For older children, following group rules</li></ul>	<b>Children acquire and use knowledge and skills</b> <i>This involves skills such as:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinking, reasoning, remembering</li><li>• Problem-solving</li><li>• Using symbols and language</li><li>• Understanding physical and social worlds</li></ul>	<b>Children use appropriate behavior to meet their needs</b> <i>This involves skills such as:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking care of basic needs</li><li>• Getting from place to place and using tools</li><li>• Contributing to own health and safety</li></ul>

**The ultimate goal for all children** is to be full and active participants in their homes, schools, and communities now and in the future. Preschool services build on natural learning occurring during the early years of life. The supports and services provided can help you to help your child make powerful connections by taking advantage of opportunities presented through daily routines and activities both at home as well as within an early childhood program. In Maryland, families of children enrolled in a local Infants and Toddlers Program have the option to extend early intervention services through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) after age three until the beginning of the school year following the child's fourth birthday. For more information on the **extended IFSP option**, please refer to the fourth booklet in the Parent Information Series, *A Family Guide to Next Steps: When Your Child in Early Intervention Turns Three*.





# Preschool Special Education Services

These early years are the prime time for your child's learning and development. Preschool special education services can help to open the window of opportunity for your child and family.

## Preschool services can help you and your family to:

- Identify your child's strengths, interests and needs
- Support and promote your child's development
- Include your child in family and community life
- Help your child to be prepared for kindergarten

## Preschool services can be provided anywhere in the community:

- Public school preschool classrooms of various types
- Community-based public and private early care and education programs/settings such as:
  - » A child care center or family child care home
  - » Private nursery school
  - » Local Head Start program
- Places in the community where your child spends time, such as:
  - » Public libraries
  - » Recreational centers
  - » Playgrounds
  - » Your home

## As a parent, you help decide:

- The preschool goals that are important for your child's development and school readiness
- The preschool services that your child needs
- When and where your child will receive preschool services

While all preschoolers with developmental delays and disabilities are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), service delivery models may vary across local programs. **Your Local Infants and Toddlers Program, Local School System, and other early care and education providers can help address your concerns with support and services specially designed to meet the unique needs of your child and family.** These early years are the prime time for your child's learning and development. Preschool special education services can help to open the window of opportunity for your child and family.

## Use This Guide

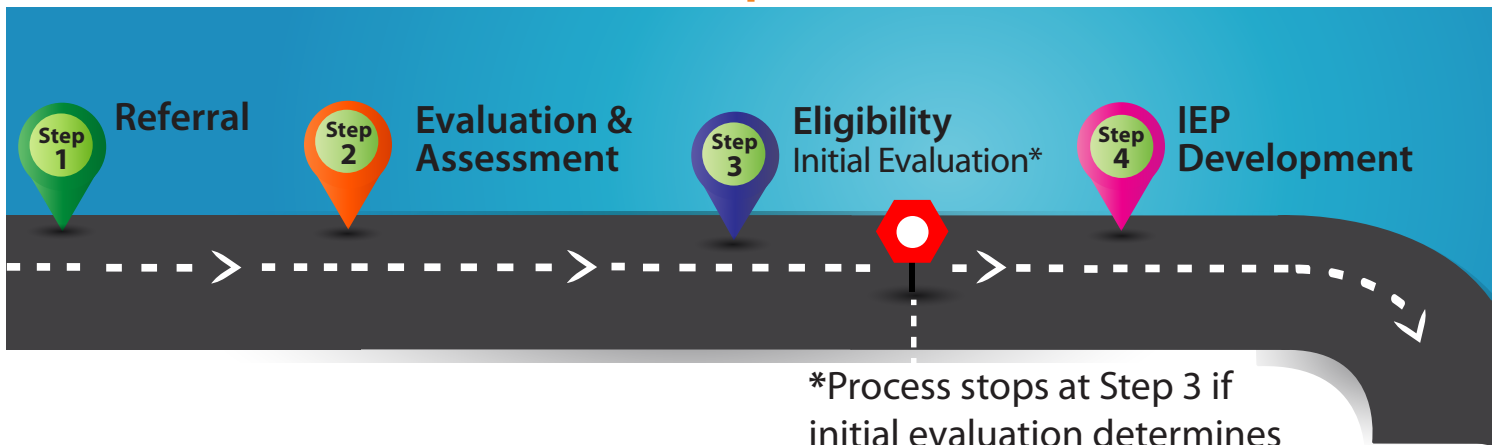
## Use this guide to assist you in understanding:

- How preschool special education and related services work
- Your legal rights and protections
- Family supports and services available to you and your family



# Initial Steps In Maryland's IEP Process

The first step is referral.



\*Process stops at Step 3 if initial evaluation determines child ineligible.

## Step 1: Referral

The first step in the special education process is referral to your local school system’s Child Find office.

Your child may have received a developmental screening at your pediatrician’s office or your childcare or preschool provider may have expressed concerns and recommended a referral to your local school system. If you have concerns about your child’s development and learning, you do not need to wait for a professional to suggest a referral. You can make the call directly to the local school system Child Find office, or special education department, to see about having your child assessed in any areas of development that concern you. Refer to the back page of this guide for the Child Find office in each Local School System.

**NOTE:** If your child has been receiving early intervention services through an IFSP, you will not need to contact the local school system Child Find Office. Information regarding community options and service delivery models, including your choice to continue to receive early intervention services through an IFSP, or to move to preschool special education services through an IEP, will have been shared with you as part of your child’s transition planning meeting.

### A Tip for Parents

As a parent, trust your instincts and your knowledge of your child. If you have a concern about your child’s development, find out whether or not there is a valid reason and get any needed help early in your child’s life to ensure your child’s optimal development. Don’t lose time waiting to see if it “goes away” and don’t worry that referring your child will cause unnecessary problems that will follow him or her through school. This is not accurate. Delays or disabilities are more likely to be minimized or resolved if they are addressed early.



## Step 2: Evaluation and Assessment

### Evaluation

Once a referral is made, parental consent is needed before a child may be assessed. **Under federal IDEA regulations and Code of Maryland Annotated Regulations (COMAR 13A.05.01), the evaluation process, which includes a review of assessment results and other available information about the child's development and learning, must be completed within 60 days after the parent gives written consent.** The evaluation process must assess the child in all areas related to his or her suspected disability. It is an individualized process that utilizes formal and informal measures, including information shared by parents and other primary caregivers. The process is completed through a comprehensive review of information gathered about the child by the IEP team, of which parents are critical members. The evaluation process is intended to answer the following questions:

- Does the child have a disability that requires the provision of special education and related services?
- What are the child's specific educational needs?
- What special education and related services are appropriate for addressing the child's identified needs?

**NOTE: If you disagree with the results or outcome of the evaluation process, you have the right to take your child for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE).** Parents may obtain an IEE at their own expense, which the local school system must consider in making decisions regarding the child's educational needs. However, the IDEA also has procedures which allow parents to obtain an IEE at public expense.

### Assessment

Early childhood assessment may be both **formal and informal**: formal, as in standardized measures such as the Battelle Developmental Inventory, Second Edition; informal, as in using recorded observations and interviews about the child's skills, knowledge or behaviors across settings in relation to established expectations for all children of the same chronological age. The results of assessments contribute critical information to the evaluation process for determining the child's eligibility for special education and related services. These results also provide the basis on which IEP goals are developed and implemented through specialized instruction.

**It is important that what you know and believe about your child is included in the assessment information** and the IEP team discussion. Therefore, your participation throughout this process is crucial. You know your child and how he/she interacts with others, learns and participates in activities, and is able to use appropriate behavior to get what he/she wants and needs better than anyone else. You have countless experiences with your child at home and in the community that can help the IEP team learn more. This will provide valuable information that will be useful for the team in determining eligibility, developing an effective IEP, and monitoring future progress.

Additionally assessment—particularly ongoing formative assessment—provides teachers, related services providers and parents with information on the child's progress in narrowing the performance gap with peers without disabilities. Assessment as a formative measure helps to inform the teacher's or provider's planning for and differentiating instruction. It maintains a focus on strategies and activities appropriate for the child's developmental level while, at the same time, moving them towards mastery of age appropriate skills, knowledge and behaviors.

## A Look at My Child's Development



*The goal of early intervention and preschool special education is to enable all young children to be active and successful participants at home, in the community, and in places like childcare or preschool programs. Therefore, children need to develop skills in three outcome areas: (1) developing positive social-emotional skills; (2) acquiring and using knowledge and skills; and (3) using appropriate behavior to meet their needs. As you complete the following chart, document what you have observed with your child in these three functional areas of development. It is important that what you know and believe about your child is included in the assessment information and the IFSP/IEP team discussion.*

	How Does My Child ...	Provide examples
DEVELOPING POSITIVE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS, including social relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relate to family members?</li> <li>• Relate to/interact with other adults?</li> <li>• Relate to/interact with siblings/other children?</li> <li>• Communicate/regulate emotions and feelings?</li> <li>• Use greetings (hi/bye)</li> <li>• Engage others in play?</li> <li>• Adapt to changes in routines or settings?</li> <li>• Respond to new people &amp; places</li> <li>• Understand and follow social rules?</li> </ul> <p><b>Do you have any concerns in this area?</b></p>	
ACQUIRING AND USING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate (e.g., through sign language, spoken vocabulary, augmentative device, picture symbols)?</li> <li>• Imitate what he/she sees &amp; hears</li> <li>• Play with toys (what toys, how, &amp; for how long)</li> <li>• Interact with books, pictures, print?</li> <li>• Problem solve new situations?</li> <li>• Understand pre-academic concepts?</li> <li>• Understand and respond to directions?</li> </ul> <p><b>Do you have any concerns in this area?</b></p>	
USE OF APPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS TO MEET NEEDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate wants and needs?</li> <li>• Participate in feeding?</li> <li>• Participate in dressing?</li> <li>• Sleeping?</li> <li>• Using the potty?</li> <li>• Respond to delays in getting needs/wants met?</li> <li>• Seek help when necessary?</li> <li>• Move around to get things?</li> <li>• Follows rules related safety? (holds hands, stops, understands "hot")</li> </ul> <p><b>Do you have any concerns in this area?</b></p>	





## Tips for Parents

- Provide relevant information about your child, including your child’s medical history. Share any necessary documents, such as medical records and results from prior testing, if you have them available.
- Share the priorities and concerns your family has about your child’s development.
- Participate in all assessments. The time and location for each assessment will be determined in consultation with you as the family.
- Ask questions so that you understand the process and the program. The professionals you are working with understand that these services are new to most families. They can help answer your questions. *No question is insignificant or unnecessary.*

## Evaluation and Assessment When Transitioning from Early Intervention Services To Preschool Special Education Services

If your family has been enrolled in your local Infants and Toddlers Program as your child’s 3rd birthday approaches, your IFSP team will support you to develop a transition plan to include working with the preschool program to determine eligibility for preschool special education services through evaluation and assessment. The Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program **offers families two choices** if your child is found eligible for preschool special education:

- 1) **BEGIN** preschool special education and related services through an IEP for your child at age three.
- 2) Or, **CONTINUE** early intervention services through an EXTENDED IFSP after age 3, until the beginning of the school year following your child’s 4th birthday (if found eligible for preschool special education and related services prior to turning three). If you choose this option, you can decide at any time that you want to end early intervention services through an Extended IFSP and initiate services for your child through an IEP.

**NOTE:** An IFSP for a child after age 3 must include outcomes that address the child’s school readiness, including areas of pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, and language development.

**To help families better understand the transition process,** Maryland’s Birth To Kindergarten Parent Information Series includes the publication, *A Family Guide to Next Steps: When Your Child in Early Intervention Turns Three*. You may request a copy from your Local Infants and Toddlers Program (see back page for contact information).

## Step 3: Eligibility

In Maryland, children 3 years of age to kindergarten-age are determined to be eligible to receive preschool special education and related services through an IEP team process. Young children ages 3 to kindergarten who have a disability, as defined by one of the categories listed below, are eligible for preschool services provided through the local school system.

In Maryland, the categories of disability include:

- |                        |                                  |  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| • Autism               | • Hearing Impairment             | • Speech or Language Impairment                        |
| • Deaf                 | • Intellectual Disability        | • Traumatic Brain Injury                               |
| • Deaf-Blindness       | • Orthopedic Impairment          | • Visual Impairment                                    |
| • Developmental Delay  | • Other Health Impairment        | • Multiple Disabilities (Cognitive, Sensory, Physical) |
| • Emotional Disability | • Specific Learning Disabilities |  |





# Step 4: IEP Development

## Developing the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Once the evaluation process is complete, and your child has been found eligible as a child with a disability in need of special education and related services, the next step in the process is to develop a plan for addressing the identified needs. The IEP team, which includes parents, must meet to develop an Individualized Education Program, or IEP.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP) II. PRESENT LEVEL OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE  
MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MSDE) DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION/EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES (Form approved by MSDE for use July 1, 2016)

Name: Agency: IEP Team Meeting Date: / /

PRESCHOOL AGED - PRESENT LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE

Where does the child spend time?

☐ Child care center

☐ Family Support Center

☐ Parent's place of employment

☐ Public Pre-K program

☐ Child's home

☐ Home of family member

☐ Parks and Recreation program or activities

☐ Religious setting

☐ Early Head Start/Head Start

☐ Judy Center

☐ Preschool playgroup

☐ Shelter

☐ Family Child Care

☐ Library

☐ Private Pre-K/Nursery school

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What are parent's concerns and priorities regarding their preschool child's educational and functional performance? \_\_\_\_\_

How does the child's disability affect his/her access to and participation in age appropriate activities? \_\_\_\_\_

Consider the child's strengths and needs across three functional areas: STRENGTHS AND NEEDS SUMMARY

For children to be active and successful participants at home, in the community, and in places like child care or preschool programs, they need to develop skills in three functional areas: (1) developing positive social-emotional skills; (2) acquiring and using knowledge and skills; and (3) taking appropriate action to meet needs. Multiple sources of information are used to understand the child's individual progress in relation to him/herself and to same age peers. These sources include the family's concerns and priorities and the child's educational and functional performance across settings.

HOW DOES THE CHILD...

CHILD'S STRENGTHS

What are some things the child likes to do? What skills does the child demonstrate or is beginning to demonstrate?

CHILD'S NEEDS

What are some things or behaviors that the child does not do or are difficult for the child? In what activities or skill areas does the child need considerable support and/or practice?

HOW DOES THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT RELATE TO HIS/HER SAME-AGE PEERS?

Relative to same age peers:  
Has the skills that we would expect of his/her age in regard to this area.  
Has the skills that we would expect of his/her age in regard to this area; however, there are concerns with this area.  
Shows many age expected skills, but continues to show some functioning that might be described like that of a slightly younger child in this area.  
Shows occasional use of some age expected skills, but more of his/her skills are not yet age expected in this area.  
Is not yet using skills expected of his/her age. He/she does however use many important and immediate foundational skills to build upon in this area.  
Is showing some emerging or immediate foundational skills, which will help him/her to work toward age appropriate skills in this area.  
Functioning might be described as like that of a much younger child. He/she shows early skills, but not yet immediate foundational or age-expected skills in this area.

Child Outcome Summary (COS): ☐ Entry ☐ Interim ☐ Exit ☐ N/A  
COS Completed Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Sources: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Collected without parent input

DEVELOPING POSITIVE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Relate to family members
- Relate to interact with other adults
- Relate to interact with siblings/other children
- Communicate/regulate emotions and feelings
- Engage others in social interactions and play
- Adapt to changes in routines or settings
- Understand and follow social rules

Choose a rating from the list above:  
Relative to same age peers - \_\_\_\_\_

Only answer if updating the original Strengths and Needs Summary:  
Has the child shown any new skills or behaviors related to positive social-emotional development since the last Strengths and Needs Summary?  
☐ Yes ☐ No

ACQUIRING AND USING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

- Communicate (e.g., through sign language, spoken vocabulary, augmentative device, picture symbols)
- Use words/skills in everyday settings, including play
- Interact with books, pictures, print
- Problem solve new situations
- Understand pre-academic concepts
- Understand and respond to directions

Choose a rating from the list above:  
Relative to same age peers - \_\_\_\_\_

Only answer if updating the original Strengths and Needs Summary:  
Has the child shown any new skills or behaviors related to acquiring and using knowledge and skills since the last Strengths and Needs Summary?  
☐ Yes ☐ No

TAKING APPROPRIATE ACTION TO MEET NEEDS

- Communicate wants and needs
- Contribute to his own health and safety
- Meet self-care needs (feeding, dressing, toileting)
- Respond to delays in getting needs/wants met
- Seek help when necessary
- Move around to get things

Choose a rating from the list above:  
Relative to same age peers - \_\_\_\_\_

Only answer if updating the original Strengths and Needs Summary:  
Has the child shown any new skills or behaviors related to taking actions to meet needs since the last Strengths and Needs Summary?  
☐ Yes ☐ No

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The IEP will be the foundation for providing services and supports to meet the unique needs of your child. For preschool children, the IEP team looks at the child's strengths, as well as areas of identified concern in relation to the three early childhood outcomes: 1) positive social skills and relationships, 2) acquiring and using knowledge and skills, and 3) use of appropriate behavior to meet needs. This discussion, referred to as the **Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Process**, is captured in the *Preschool Aged Present Level of Educational and Functional Performance* section of the IEP document and is intended to occur prior to the development of IEP goals.

The COS is not an assessment. Rather, it provides a way for IEP teams to summarize the child's level of functioning in the three outcome areas compared to that of same-age peers, using information from a variety of sources, including but not limited to formal evaluation using standardized tools, parent and provider input, observations, and authentic assessment. This summary occurs when all children enter services at the first IEP, annually as a means of monitoring progress, and at exit from preschool special education services. The COS process must be completed by the IEP team, and collectively the team needs to understand: 1) the content of the three child outcomes; age-expected child development, 2) how the child functions across settings and situations, and 3) age expectations within the child and family's culture. Preschool personnel can help everyone understand what skills and behaviors are involved with each of the three outcome areas and with what typical development looks like for same-age children.

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**Families and primary caregivers provide the rich information to the rest of the team about the child's functioning across a variety of settings and about your family's cultural expectations for child development.** Again, as with any and all parts of your child and family's participation in preschool special education services, your input and involvement throughout the COS process is essential. Together, the team develops a summary statement that describes the child's functioning compared to same-age peers in each outcome area, based on all the information available. At annual and exit IEPs, the team will together determine what progress has been made in each outcome area and again summarize the child's functioning compared to same-age peers.

Each state is required to report on the three child outcomes as a way to measure program effectiveness. The **Child Outcomes Summary (COS) process** is used in Maryland to meet these federal reporting requirements for all children receiving services through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or a preschool Individualized Education Program (IEP). When you as a parent cannot participate in face-to-face IEP meetings, you can share information via phone or send written information for the team's consideration. The form **A Look at My Child's Development** (page 7) may assist you to document information about your child around the three early childhood outcomes.

## The IEP document puts into writing:

- Your child's present levels of performance.
- Goals for your child's development and school readiness.
- The services that your child will receive related to the goals, and their frequency and duration.
- The environment or setting in which these services will be provided.

**IEP goals for a child must be linked to the "general curriculum" or to expectations appropriate for preschool age children.** In other words, IEP goals must address school readiness: the academic and social foundations skills, knowledge, and behaviors that a child needs in order to be ready to engage in and benefit from the school curriculum appropriate for his/her age or grade level. For example, a child's goals should have a connection to the state Early Learning Standards for his/her age level and to the related prekindergarten or kindergarten curriculum standards depending on the child's age and/or grade level. The reason for this requirement is that the IEP is the vehicle for helping a child access and participate in the early childhood curriculum as well as participate in activities appropriate for preschoolers.

**The IEP is more than just a written document.** The IEP represents a working partnership between you and the preschool special education program. It helps provide answers to questions you may have about your child's development. **Think of your child's IEP as the way for your child to be able to participate and succeed in the curriculum and activities appropriate for preschoolers.** The IEP specifies goals and supports for your child to be able to do this.

### Building IEPs With Maryland Families: What A Great IDEA!

Maryland developed a booklet that includes additional guidance and resources, such as checklists for all steps in the IEP process. **Building IEPs with Maryland Families: What a Great Idea!** is designed for families by families. You may find this booklet helpful as you prepare for the initial development, implementation, and later annual reviews of your child's IEP. The booklet is available from your local school system Child Find Office or online at <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx>.





# IEP Services

**Services on your child's initial IEP may not begin without your permission.** After parents provide written consent for the IEP, and for services to begin, the local school system makes sure that the IEP services are implemented as soon as possible and in the way specified in the IEP document.

## Examples of Preschool Services include:

- Transportation
- Speech and language services
- Specialized instruction
- Assistive technology services, which may include assistive technology devices
- Audiology services
- Psychological services
- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Social work services
- Early identification and assessment services
- Medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes
- Vision services, including orientation and mobility services
- Parent counseling and training
- Interpreting services
- Recreation, including therapeutic recreation
- School health services
- School nurse services
- Extended school year services if the IEP team determines the individual student eligible

# Ongoing Review of the IEP

Parents are given a copy of the IEP. Each of the child's teachers/service providers have access to the IEP and knows his or her specific responsibilities for carrying out the IEP. This includes the accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided to the child according to the IEP. **The child's IEP is reviewed by the IEP team at least once a year**, or more often if the parents or the child's providers ask for a meeting. If necessary, the IEP is revised by the team, including the parents. In addition, at least every three years the child must be reevaluated in order to determine: if the child continues to be a child with a disability, as defined by the law; and the child's educational needs. The child must be reevaluated more often if conditions warrant or if the child's parent or teacher/service provider asks for a new evaluation.





# Early Childhood Settings

## Core Principles of an Inclusive Early Childhood Education

**Every child** with a disability is entitled to participate in early childhood settings and activities with their typically developing peers.

**Diversity** among children, families, and providers is celebrated.

**Collaboration** among providers and agencies serving all young children is a cornerstone of a quality inclusive education.

## Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Preschool services may be delivered in a variety of settings. The setting in which a preschooler receives services is decided by the IEP team, based on multiple factors, including the types of goals and supports your child may need. **For children receiving special education and related services through an IEP, preschool services must be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE).** The LRE is the setting in which a child with a disability receives special education and related services while being educated with peers without disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate.

**Examples of least restrictive environment include, but are not limited to:**

- Child care center
- Family child care
- Head Start
- Home
- Community library
- Parks and recreation program
- Public school preschool special class, prekindergarten, or kindergarten program

The supports that a child with disabilities needs, and the setting itself, appropriately enables the child's successful access to and participation in the program. The least restrictive environment setting or placement where a child receives these services must be as close as possible to his/her home. In Maryland, inclusive education for young children of all ability levels is one that supports each child's participation in the continuum of early childhood settings – community-based and school-based – with appropriate modifications and accommodations that support school readiness and positive outcomes.

## Maryland's Guiding Principle for Inclusive Education

**Maryland**, where all children, with and without disabilities, learn, play and grow together, reach their full potential, and meaningfully participate in their communities.







# Your Rights and Protections

Federal and state laws provide many protections for children and families. These rights help assure that your preschool services are provided in a voluntary, nondiscriminatory manner, at no cost to your family. Maryland summarizes these rights in its Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards Notice.

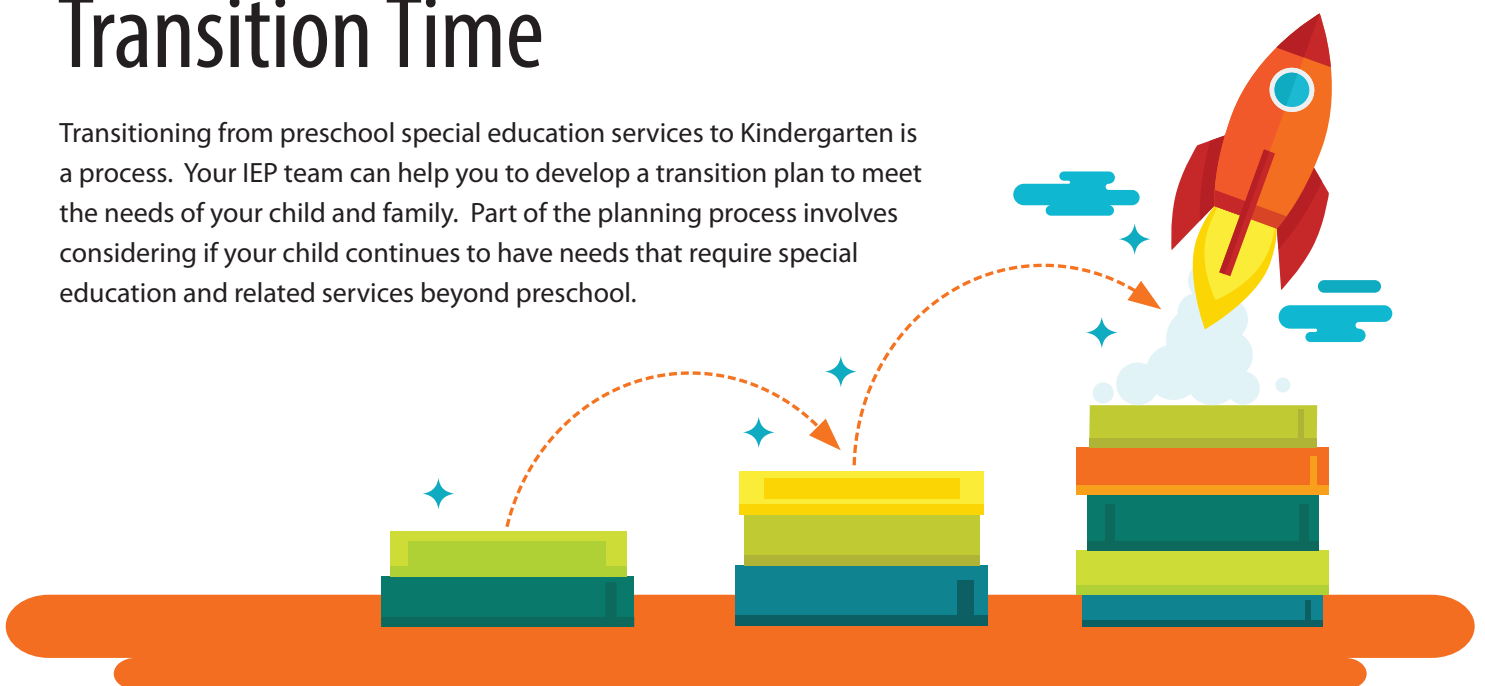
Among the rights outlined in the [Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice](#), you have a right to:

- Consent to evaluation, assessment and provision of services.
- Receive notice of your rights and actions proposed by the early intervention or special education system.
- Review your child's intervention or special education record and request amendments.
- Keep your child's and family's personal information confidential, as required.
- File a complaint.
- Play an active role in the special education or early intervention process as a valued member of the IFSP/IEP team.

A copy of the [Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice](#) will be provided to you at least once a year from your local school system. However, you may request a copy at any time.

## Transition Time

Transitioning from preschool special education services to Kindergarten is a process. Your IEP team can help you to develop a transition plan to meet the needs of your child and family. Part of the planning process involves considering if your child continues to have needs that require special education and related services beyond preschool.





# 10 Things Every Parent Should Know

- 1. You are your child's best advocate.** You know your child and your child's history better than anyone. Clearly communicate what you think your child needs. Be sure to speak with your child's special education teacher or service providers often to collaborate by planning and problem solving with your entire team.
- 2. Maryland has a birth to kindergarten system of services available for young children who have developmental delays or disabilities and are found eligible.** In the context of this system, your eligible preschooler can receive services that will address his/her needs and support learning and progress to help maximize his/her potential. The services and settings will be those which best help your child meet identified goals.
- 3.** If your child has been receiving early intervention services from your Local Infants and Toddlers Program before age 3, s/he may be eligible for special education and related services at age 3. **In that case, you have options related to the type of preschool services your child can access.** You may choose for your child to receive special education and related services through an IEP or to continue to receive early intervention services through an extended IFSP at age 3.
- 4. If you have a concern about your three- to five-year-old's development or learning,** your local school system can evaluate your child and provide necessary services to support your child's progress. If your child is found eligible for special education and related services, an IEP will be developed with you as a partner, which will document goals and supports necessary for your child to progress, as well as a setting most appropriate for services to be provided.
- 5. Your child's preschool services must be provided in the least restrictive environment** to the maximum extent appropriate. There are many school and community-based options for environments or settings in which your child can receive preschool services. The IEP team, with you as a partner, will determine the setting most appropriate for your child based on a number of factors.
- 6. There is no charge to families for preschool services.** Under State and federal law, all preschool special education services must be provided free-of-charge, as part of a Free Appropriate Public Education. There is never a "wait list" for services.
- 7. Your child's IEP is a legal document and will not resemble anyone else's.** It is unique, based on the needs of your child, and is the foundation for providing individualized services and supports. It may also look different from what is offered in other states.
- 8. Your child's IEP is the vehicle to help him/her access the curriculum and activities to which all children have access.** The IEP must have a statement indicating how your child's developmental delay or disability hinders him/her from fully participating in the general curriculum, or activities appropriate for preschoolers. Based on this statement and a description of his/her current levels of functioning (strengths and needs), IEP goals are developed and services and supports are determined which will help your child to achieve the goals.
- 9.** Remember that as a parent **you and your child have certain rights under state and federal law.** Each state must provide parents with a list of their rights. During the development of your child's IEP, you will receive a copy of the document, Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice. There are additional resources in this Parent Information Series to help you understand your rights.
- 10. You are your child's first and best teacher. You are an important partner** in your child's evaluation and preschool services. Nobody has more knowledge of or opportunity to teach your child skills during everyday interactions than you do. Everything you do with your child and the way that you talk with, respond to, and interact with him/her is teaching, and is a rich opportunity for him/her to learn important developmental knowledge and skills.



# Glossary of Terms

**Access:** A defining feature of inclusion which involves providing a wide range of activities and environments for every student by removing physical barriers and offering multiple ways to promote learning and development.

**Accommodations:** Changes that can be made in the way a student accesses information and demonstrates performance. Accommodations make it possible for students to work around the effect of their disabilities and help them to access information and show what they know and are able to do.

**Assessment:** Ongoing procedures used by qualified professionals throughout a child’s early intervention/preschool services experience to identify the child’s unique needs, the family’s resources, concerns and priorities related to their child’s development, and the nature and extent of services required to meet these needs.

**Child Advocate:** A parent or professional, paid or unpaid, who acts on behalf of a child and family to protect their rights and interests to ensure their access to services for which they are eligible.

**Child Find:** Activities which are required by law to be conducted in states and local jurisdictions to identify, locate, and evaluate children with disabilities who need special education and related services.

**Child Outcomes Summary (COS) process:** The process used in Maryland for measuring child outcomes to meet federal accountability reporting requirements for all children receiving services through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or a preschool Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**Curriculum:** An organized plan or framework containing all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, district, and state.

**Curriculum standards:** Learning outcomes within an organized framework that define the content to be learned in terms of what students should learn, know, and be able to do.

**Developmental Delay:** Refers to children ages 3 through 7 who are experiencing developmental delays, as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following areas: physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, or adaptive development that adversely affects a child’s educational performance; and who, because of the developmental delays, need special education and related services.

**Disability:** Any restriction or lack (resulting from any impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered typical for a human being.

**Early Intervention:** A collection of services provided by public and private agencies and designed by law to support eligible children and their families in enhancing a child’s potential for growth and development from birth to age three (and for three and four year olds on the extended option).

**Eligibility:** The status of qualifying for special education and related services by meeting criteria under the law that determines that a student has a disability.









**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** The LRE is the setting in which a child with a disability receives a free appropriate public education (FAPE) while being educated with peers without disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate.

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**Literacy:** The ability to read and write.

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**Mediation:** A confidential, voluntary process that allows parties to resolve disputes without a formal due process hearing. An impartial mediator helps the parties to express their views and positions and to understand the other's views and positions. The mediator's role is to facilitate discussion and help parties reach an agreement—not to recommend solutions or take positions or sides.

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**Modifications:** Changes to preschool program activities or materials to maximize a child's participation in activities and routines.

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**Natural Environments (NE):** Home and community settings that are natural or typical for an infant, toddler, or preschooler of the same age.

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**Numeracy:** The ability to reason and to apply simple numerical concepts.

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**Parent:** A biological or adoptive, parent, guardian, acting parent, or surrogate parent; this term does not include the State if the child is a ward of the State.

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**Participation:** A defining feature of inclusion which involves using a range of instructional approaches to promote engagement in play and learning activities, and a sense of belonging for every student.

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**Peers:** Children or students of the same age level or grade level

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**School Readiness:** A state of early development that enables a child to engage in and benefit from school early learning curriculum and experiences.

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**Setting:** Settings are places where children receive early intervention or special education services such as a child care center, family child care, Head Start, home, community library, parks and recreation program, or public school preschool special class, prekindergarten, or kindergarten program, etc.

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**Special Education:** Educational programs and activities for eligible students ages 3 through 21 with disabilities so that they may receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to which they are entitled under State and federal law. Special education services support a student's ability to access and participate in the general curriculum.

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**Supports:** A defining feature of inclusion which involves ensuring an infrastructure of system level elements to ensure a high quality inclusive program (e.g., professional development) integrating specialized services with general early care and education, and opportunities for communication and collaboration among families and professionals (DEC/NAEYC, 2009).

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**Transition:** The movement from one program to another.

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# Maryland Family Support Services

At any point during your journey, you may need the support of individuals who know about special resources, can share valuable information, or have life experiences similar to yours.

In Maryland, families receiving early intervention services can find support through their local **Family Support Services**. These services are typically staffed by a parent of a child with a disability, and offer information on community services, referrals to local support and advocacy groups, and opportunities for families to network and share ideas and experiences with other families. In addition, as families transition to next steps, family support services are also available. They can guide and support families as they move through the transition process from age 3 to kindergarten.

**Your local Family Support Services are just a call away.** Ask your local Infants and Toddlers Program or Preschool Program for contact information or go online to: <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/Special-Ed/FSDR/FSS/FSSDirectory.pdf>.

## Resources for Families

### Maryland Learning Links

Visit Maryland Learning Links online at [www.MarylandLearningLinks.org](http://www.MarylandLearningLinks.org) to find resources for families and caregivers of children with disabilities, birth through age 21.

### Maryland's Birth To Kindergarten Parent Information Series

**Maryland's Birth To Kindergarten Parent Information Series** is a collection of publications designed to assist families as they participate in the statewide early intervention and education system of services for children with disabilities from birth to kindergarten. Each publication is available from your Local Infants and Toddlers Program, Local School System and on the Maryland State Department of Education website: <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx>.

#### The series includes the following guides:

- *A Family Guide to Early Intervention Services*
- *Parental Rights: A Companion Guide to the Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice*
- *The IFSP: A Family Guide To Understanding the Individualized Family Service Plan*
- *A Family Guide to Next Steps: When Your Child in Early Intervention Turns Three*
- *A Family Guide to Preschool Special Education Services*
- *A Family Guide to Early Childhood Transitions: Birth to Kindergarten*

### Maryland Family Support Services

If your child transitions to school-age special education services, additional Family Support Services personnel will be available to provide resources and support to you and your family.

# More Resources for Families

For additional information, contact your:

## Local Infants and Toddlers Programs

Allegany County	301-759-2415
Anne Arundel County	410-222-6911
Baltimore City	410-396-1666
Baltimore County	410-809-2169
Calvert County	410-414-7034
Caroline County	410-479-3246
Carroll County	410-876-4437, ext. 2277
Cecil County	410-996-5444
Charles County	301-609-6808
Dorchester County	410-221-1111, ext. 1024
Frederick County	301-600-1612
Garrett County	301-533-0240
Harford County	410-638-3823
Howard County	410-313-7017
Kent County	410-778-7164
Montgomery County	240-777-3997
Prince George's County	301-925-6627
Queen Anne's County	443-758-0720, ext. 4458
Somerset County	410-651-1616, ext. 239
St. Mary's County	301-475-5511, ext. 32223
Talbot County	410-820-0319
Washington County	301-766-8217
Wicomico County	410-677-5250
Worcester County	410-632-5033
Maryland School for the Blind	410-444-5000
Maryland School for the Deaf	410-480-4545

## Online Resources from the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services

**Maryland Learning Links** offers information and resources related to Early Intervention and Special Education in Maryland. Whether you are a parent, teacher or provider, you are sure to benefit from the site's comprehensive and user-friendly blend of knowledge and real-world practice, all of it built on the belief that every child can learn and achieve both inside and outside the classroom. *Maryland Learning Links* was developed and produced by the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins University, Center for Technology in Education (<https://marylandlearninglinks.org/birth-to-kindergarten/>).

**Maryland Public Schools.** The Maryland State Department of Education, *Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services* provides leadership, support, and accountability for results to local school systems, public agencies, and stakeholders through a seamless system of coordinated services to children and students with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/index.aspx>).

A Spanish translation of this guide is available online at **Maryland Public Schools** (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/info.aspx>).

## Additional Information

Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services  
200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201  
410-767-7770 phone | 410-333-8165 fax | 1-800-535-0182 toll free

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